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Mind, Machines and Paranormal Phenomena

MIND, MACHINES AND PARANORMAL PHENOMENA
A rejoinder to Beloffs radical dualist perspective

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In the very first issue of the Journal of Consciousness Studies, dualist John Beloff discusses the problem of how interactions may occur between the supposedly different realms of mind and matter. As a canditate for a process of control of the first over the latter, he proposes the paranormal phenomenon of psychokinesis (Beloff, 1994). In his own words:

> ... results [of meta-analyses of parapsychological experiments] show that the over-all significance of [psi] phenomena is astronomical . . . The relevance of parapsychology to the problem at issue [i.e. dualism vs. epiphenomenalism] should now become apparent . . . if it is the case that mind can influence intentionally the behaviour of an object other than its own brain it would be futile to doubt that a mind can interact with its own brain . . .

It is indeed the case that meta-analyses covering many years of research give very strong support to the reality of psi phenomena (Utts, 1991). Historical analysis has shown, however, that the results of some of the stronger paradigms are subject to a decline effect after an initial successful period of ten to twenty years. And even if the reality of the phenomena stand up against time, a proper use of the available data - as opposed to Beloff s selective use of it - would at least complicate the naive interactionist picture and in fact argue against the dualist perspective.
For the fact is that Beloff avoids discussing two sets of data, both of which suggest that temporal cause-effect sequences may break down in parapsychological research. In the first place, a meta-analysis of so-called precognition experiments, in which the subjects guess the card-order in a pack which still has to be randomised, is discussed in the very same article (Utts, 199 1) that Beloff refers to in defence of his dualist position. Although the results of this meta-analysis on precognition are stronger than those of the metaanalysis on psychokinesis, Beloff chooses to ignore precognition.
The second set of data concerns so-called 'psychokinesis on pre-recorded targets'. Here the task of the subject is to 'influence' random events that have already been registered BEFORE the direction of subject's intention was (randomly) determined. A review of twenty-six published articles (Bien-nan, 1996; see also Schmidt & Stapp, 1994) yielded results of a magnitude

comparable to the results of the direct (i.e. 'real time') ‚mind over matter' experiments (Radin & Nelson, 1989), results that Beloff considered to be astronomical. Again one gets the impression that Beloff prefers not to mention these extremely counter-intuitive results.
The reason for this omission seems obvious. Beloff s dualist position, as is clear from the quote above, is framed in terms of cause-effect sequences. On his view, in the case of a volitional act, a mental state causes - and therefore is primal to - a brain state, a causal process that, according to Beloff, is brought about by psychokinesis. This traditional causal schema is difficult to reconcile with the data on a-temporal correlations discussed above, data that complicate considerably Beloff s dualist perspective on anomalies. Of course there remains the possibility of explaining seemingly a-temporal psi phenomena in terms of some form of temporal 'super psi'; however Beloff himself has argued against such complex explanations.

In general, the central role of 'time reversal' or 'time independence' in most relevant theoretical approaches to psi phenomena (see e.g. Stokes, 1977) seems not coincidental. Rather, it supports the idea that these phenomena, if real, do require a level of understanding that transcends Newtonian materialistic (as well as certain dualistic) perspectives, inherent in which is the a priori of sequential causality. Such perspectives start from the assumption that psi phenomena are mediated by some classical form of signal and can therefore be modelled in cause-effect sequences.
To accommodate thoroughly the concepts of time reversal and time independence, it might be preferable to interpret parapsychological data as an expression of 'correlations without a cause', much like the (EPR) non-local correlations in physics. There are theoretical grounds for the assumption that these latter correlations do not allow for an explanation in terms of signals travelling from one part of the system to another.
In line with this idea, Von Lucadou (1994) has explicitly proposed that

... psi correlations are an emergent property of macroscopic self-referential systems which are phenomenologically equivalent to non-local correlations in Quantum Physics ...

Such a view, in which Quantum Physics and a Theory of Mind are supposed to arise out of an underlying unified theoretical framework, would support non-reductionistic identity theories of the relation between mind and matter, rather than dualistic theories. It would also be in line with the assumption of Pauli & Jung that 'matter and psyche are two aspects of one reality' (Atmanspacher and Primas, 1996).

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